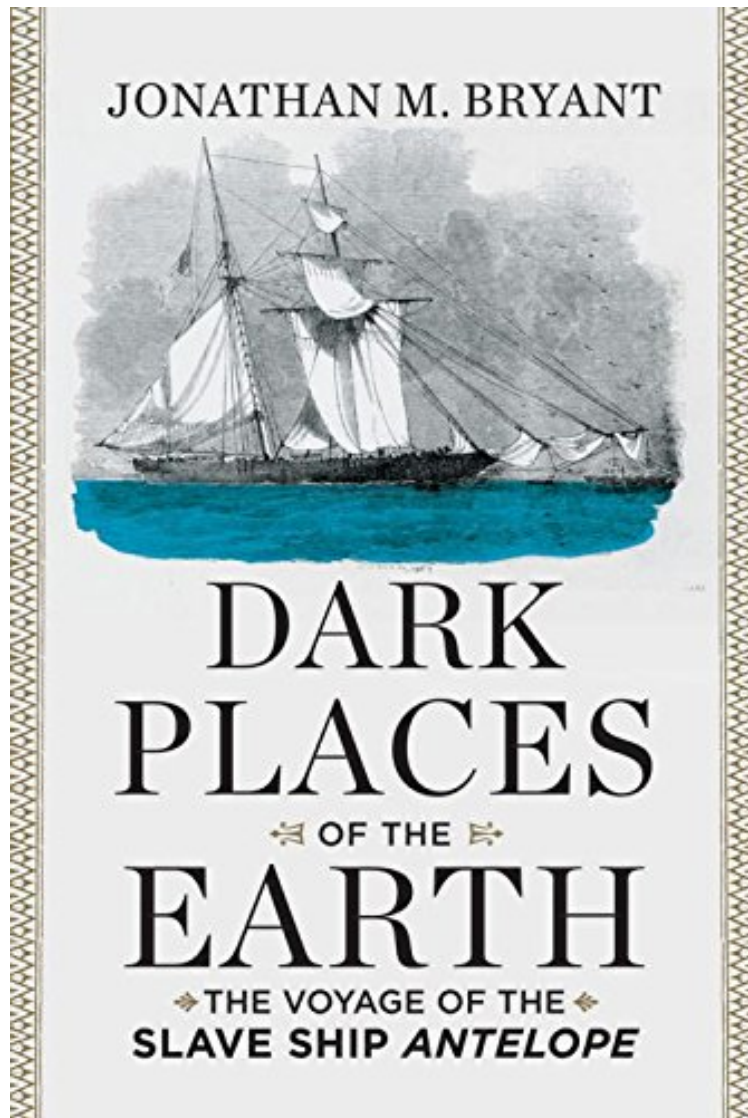


Dark Places of the Earth: The Voyage of the Slave Ship Antelope

Jonathan M. Bryant

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Jonathan M. Bryant : Dark Places of the Earth: The Voyage of the Slave Ship Antelope before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dark Places of the Earth: The Voyage of the Slave Ship Antelope:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Truth and Justice don't walk hand-in-hand.By Eric C. PetersenI think Mr. Cornell did an excellent job in covering the book, so I won't repeat his points, save to say as a non-lawyer the book was easy enough to navigate, save perhaps the first trial in Savannah where I think there were five parties to the litigation with various representatives and things got a tad dense. When the case first came before the Supreme Court

there were 6 judges, 4 were slave owners if one wants to guess how that round went. The book is a morality play: While most of the players were in agreement that by natural law slavery was an abominable institution, the argument that won the day was that of John Marshall - there were no laws on the books, no legal precedent, to declare it illegal, therefore [?] it was legal, interesting circular logic. Bryant does a masterful job painting a picture of the times (life was pretty primitive) and some of the really interesting characters involved in the dispute. Impressive was the grueling hours lawyers put into their cases in an environment where there was practically no established U.S. law; most relied on their private libraries of English common and admiralty law. The denial of justice re slavery in the 1820s still rumbles down the halls of history here, latest example being Texas' attempt to limit voting rights; this is still a very racist country nearly two centuries after the Antelope case. All in all, I really enjoyed this book. While there are a few legally dense patches about a third of the way through, the process of the case working toward a conclusion reads a bit like a thriller and holds the reader's attention. Bryant's level of knowledge about the times and the people who inhabit this book is astounding, the writing is crisp, and plants the reader firmly in the middle of the debate about the "peculiar institution" seen in the 1820s. (Since I can't figure out how to back scroll this page I can't edit it; please excuse obvious errors.)

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. This author's work is beautifully organized, well written and thoroughly documented

By Douglas Dillon

Jonathan Bryant does a masterful job of shedding a bright light on a little known but extremely important event in American History. Meticulously researched, the author's efforts show in graphic detail the plight of over 300 Africans brought to the shores of the United States by the slave ship Antelope. And in the process, he lays before readers the intricate legal wrangling that ended in Supreme Court rulings solidifying the rights of property over the natural rights of human beings, rulings that lasted for thirty-five years. As the book title indicates, this is a dark tale, one that throws readers directly into the horrors of the slave trade and the institution of slavery as practiced during the early years of the republic. Author Bryant's simple statistics of what remained of the Antelope's starving and diseased human cargo when it finally arrived in Savannah, Georgia during the year 1820 give stark and concise testimony to the brutality of such transatlantic profit seeking voyages:

- Out of 331 people originally captured and put aboard the Antelope, only 258 remained alive – a 22% loss of life.
- 83% of the captives were under the age of 20.
- The average age of all the captives was 14.
- 106 were between the ages of 5 and 10.
- 8 were between the ages of 2 and 5.

2 and 5 (that is an intentional factual repeat)

For almost eight years after landing in the United States, the captives languished in servitude on Savannah plantations as if they had been bought and sold as slaves, which they were not. And after those eight years, most of those people who actually survived were legally enslaved and sent to Florida by Supreme Court rulings. Only a small group ended up being sent back to Africa where they faced severe hardships, disease and attack by the nearby native population.

Jonathan Bryant's story of the multiple legal battles that caused the captives to wait nearly eight years is fascinating and so full of detail as to almost be overwhelming. But true to presenting the facts as he found them, the author offers readers these historical events in step-by-step fashion so as to leave no doubt about what happened. His 47 pages of notes at the end of the book speak to the incredible depth of his research.

One of the most telling scenes is when the Antelope case finally arrives at the Supreme Court of the United States in 1825, five years after the captives set foot in Georgia. The legendary John Marshall was Chief Justice and four of the justices were slave owners. The attorney for the supposed owners of the captives, Spanish and Portuguese citizens, was a slave owner as well. Enter the attorney for the government of United States trying to free the captives, Francis Scott Key. The same F.S. Key of the Star-Spangled Banner fame had slaves of his own. Slave ownership stood out on that day as a vivid yet unofficial finger pressing on the scales of justice.

This author's work is beautifully organized, well written and thoroughly documented. It is an important scholarly work and should be read by those deeply interested in slavery, the slave trade, constitutional law, international law, and American politics during the first quarter of the 19th century.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Have Patience!!!

By Shirley Hotop

This was a pick for our monthly book club and I think for most of us it was definitely a challenge. I felt like I was in an American History Law class. I struggled to keep characters straight, names organized and finally gave up on trying. On the other hand some of the facts and history in this book was fascinating and I did learn things I had no clue had happened. Not a book to take to the beach as you really have to concentrate and absorb the information you are reading and I found if I read in small sittings I did much better. I must admit I am almost 100% a fiction reader so this was a change for me to sink my teeth into and absorb.

Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist in History

A dramatic work of historical detection illuminating one of the most significant and long forgotten Supreme Court cases in American history. In 1820, a suspicious vessel was spotted lingering off the coast of northern Florida, the Spanish slave ship Antelope. Since the United States had outlawed its own participation in the international slave trade more than a decade before, the ship's almost 300 African captives were considered illegal cargo under American laws. But with slavery still a critical part of the American economy, it would eventually fall to the Supreme Court to determine whether or not they were slaves at all, and if so, what should be done with them.

Bryant describes the captives' harrowing voyage through waters rife with pirates and governed by an array of international treaties. By the time the Antelope arrived in Savannah, Georgia, the puzzle of how to determine the captives' fates was inextricably knotted. Set against the backdrop of a city in the grip of both the

financial panic of 1819 and the lingering effects of an outbreak of yellow fever, *Dark Places of the Earth* vividly recounts the eight-year legal conflict that followed, during which time the Antelope's human cargo were mercilessly put to work on the plantations of Georgia, even as their freedom remained in limbo. When at long last the Supreme Court heard the case, Francis Scott Key, the legendary Georgetown lawyer and author of "The Star Spangled Banner," represented the Antelope captives in an epic courtroom battle that identified the moral and legal implications of slavery for a generation. Four of the six justices who heard the case, including Chief Justice John Marshall, owned slaves. Despite this, Key insisted that "by the law of nature all men are free," and that the captives should by natural law be given their freedom. This argument was rejected. The court failed Key, the captives, and decades of American history, siding with the rights of property over liberty and setting the course of American jurisprudence on these issues for the next thirty-five years. The institution of slavery was given new legal cover, and another brick was laid on the road to the Civil War. The stakes of the Antelope case hinged on nothing less than the central American conflict of the nineteenth century. Both disquieting and enlightening, *Dark Places of the Earth* restores the Antelope to its rightful place as one of the most tragic, influential, and unjustly forgotten episodes in American legal history. 8 pages of illustrations

"In Bryant's gripping telling, the moral contradictions of the time are laid bare.... Carefully researched, beautifully crafted, *Dark Places* the title comes, ominously but evocatively, from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is one of the very few books that delivers on the promiscuous promise to employ an obscure episode to offer new insights on a well-trod byway of history." - David M. Shribman, *Boston Globe* "Illuminating.... Fascinating...." - David Reynolds, *Wall Street Journal* "Bryant masterfully narrates the incredible machinations revolving around the eventual case, which would drag on for seven years, and take a considerable toll on the captives awaiting a decision.... Epic in scope, providing rich portraits of life at sea and trade in the Atlantic world, slavery and its hazards in the malaria-ridden South, and the tension between the ethical and financial interests of a slew of chummy Southern gentlemen adjudicating the case, *Dark Places of the Earth* is an invaluable contribution to the understanding of antebellum America." - Bobbi Booker, *Philadelphia Tribune* "An eye-opening account of a little-known (yet horrifying) episode in American history.... In *Dark Places of the Earth*, Bryant has salvaged the history of an era when black lives mattered to slavers only as profit and the dead were thrown to the sharks." - Adam Rothman, *Washington Independent of Books* "From its poetic title to its concluding sentence, *Dark Places of the Earth* spins a riveting yarn, using the vexed voyage of the slave ship Antelope to illuminate a profound moment in American history. Vividly drawn characters and courtroom drama make this narrative history of a high order." - Marcus Rediker, author of *The Amistad Rebellion* "In this fascinating and engagingly written study, Jonathan M. Bryant illuminates a largely forgotten but highly significant episode in American legal history. Based on prodigious and meticulous research, *Dark Places of the Earth* will appeal to general readers and scholars alike. An important, original book." - Douglas R. Egerton, author of *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* "Jonathan Bryant sheds new and revealing light on a dark chapter in the history of American slavery, and on a Supreme Court decision that, despite its faults, deserves to be better known." - Brian McGinty, author of *Lincoln's Greatest Case* "Bryant presents a broadened picture of the transatlantic slave trade while illuminating a legal battle with huge moral implications." - Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal* "A richly documented work that restores the Antelope to its central place in the long, grim history of the Atlantic slave trade." - Kirkus "Detailed and fascinating account.... This is a superb examination of an obscure but important episode in the struggle against slavery." - Jay Freeman, *Booklist*, Starred review

About the Author Jonathan M. Bryant is professor of history at Georgia Southern University. He specializes in slavery, emancipation, and constitutional law. He lives in Statesboro, Georgia.